

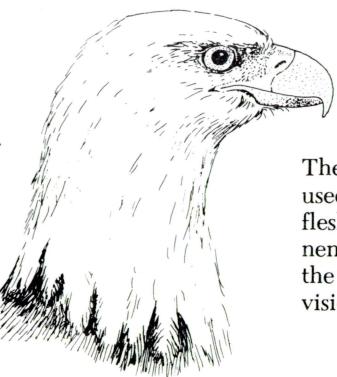
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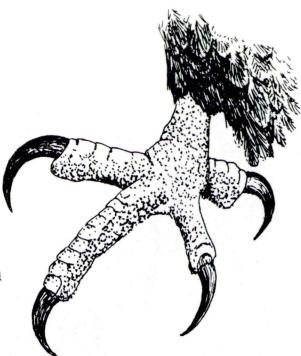
THE

**BALD EAGLE**

in

**MISSOURI**SMSU-West Plains Garnett Library  
~~WITHDRAWN~~  
from SMSU-WP Garnett Library**EAGLE FEATURES**

The hooked beak is used for tearing flesh. The prominent brow shades the eye for keener vision.



Powerful feet with needle-sharp, 2-inch talons are used to take prey.

**THE FUTURE**

There are other reasons for guarded optimism about the eagle's future. Restrictions on the use of organo-chloride pesticides, especially the banning of D.D.T. in 1972, are thought to be responsible for increased reproductive success in the Great Lakes states. In the early 1970s, Bald Eagles produced less than one young per active nest in that region. Today that average is 1.1 to 1.3.

Also, an increased public awareness about the values of eagles and strict penalties for eagle killers seems to have lessened eagle persecution. No longer do we hear about people like the New Madrid trapper who in 1907 boasted of killing 487 eagles in 37 years.

Incomprehensible shootings still do take place, however, and nearly every winter dead or wounded eagles are recovered in Missouri.

**THE EAGLE AND THE LAW**

The federal Eagle Protection Act of 1975 makes it a felony to shoot an eagle. Persons convicted of killing a Bald or Golden Eagle are subject to a fine of up to \$5,000, imprisonment up to one year, or both. Subsequent violations may result in fines up to \$10,000, two years in jail, or both. The same penalty applies for the possession of an eagle, alive or dead, or for the mere possession of eagle parts or products without a permit.

Anyone having information regarding eagle deaths should immediately contact his Local Conservation Agent or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

A \$500 reward is offered by the National Wildlife Federation to those who provide information leading to the conviction of a person who kills a Bald Eagle in violation of the Eagle Protection Act.

**WHAT CAN YOU DO?**

1. Learn more about eagles at your library or at events like the Department of Conservation's "Eagle Days."
2. Dispel myths that lead uninformed people to harm eagles.
3. Stay away from nests.
4. Report suspected nests or adult Bald Eagles seen in Missouri in summer to the Department of Conservation.
5. Report shootings to the Department of Conservation or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service agents.
6. Support organizations that acquire and protect eagle habitats or that breed or rehabilitate eagles.

**OTHER EAGLES**

The only other kind of eagle in North America is the all-brown Golden Eagle, a more western species. It wanders into Missouri in small numbers generally in the winter and preys primarily on rabbits and rodents.

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**BALD EAGLE FACTS**

**NAME:** The name "bald" is a misnomer. The scientific name, *Haliaeetus leucocephalus*, means "white-headed sea eagle."

**SIZE:** One of the largest birds of prey in the world. 6½- to 8-foot wing span, 3- to 3½-feet long, weighs 8 to 15 pounds.

**COLOR:** The distinctive white head and tail mark an adult—a sexually mature individual that is at least four to five years old. Younger individuals vary from solid dark brown to a generally mottled brown and white plumage.

**SEXUAL DIFFERENCES:** The sexes are identical in color. In many predatory birds the female is larger than the male, but in Bald Eagles size is so variable within the sexes that it cannot be used conclusively for identification.

**FOODS:** Fish compose 60 to 90 percent of the Bald Eagle diet. Dead or crippled wildlife often are selected on the wintering ground.

**PREY SIZE:** Prey items weigh from 3 to 5 pounds at most. An eagle would have difficulty carrying anything approaching even one-half its own weight, making myths of eagles carrying off human babies or calves absurd.

**NEST:** Usually built in the top of a giant tree. Enlarged annually, a Bald Eagle nest can become the largest of any North American bird—the record is 20 feet deep, 10 feet wide, and weighed two tons!

**EGGS:** Lays two (rarely three) white eggs each year. Both parents incubate for the 35- to 40-day incubation period.

**YOUNG:** At from 10 to 11 weeks of age, eaglets are fully feathered, nearly fully grown and can fly from the nest.

**LONGEVITY:** Have lived 50 years in captivity. Life expectancy in the wild may be 30 years.

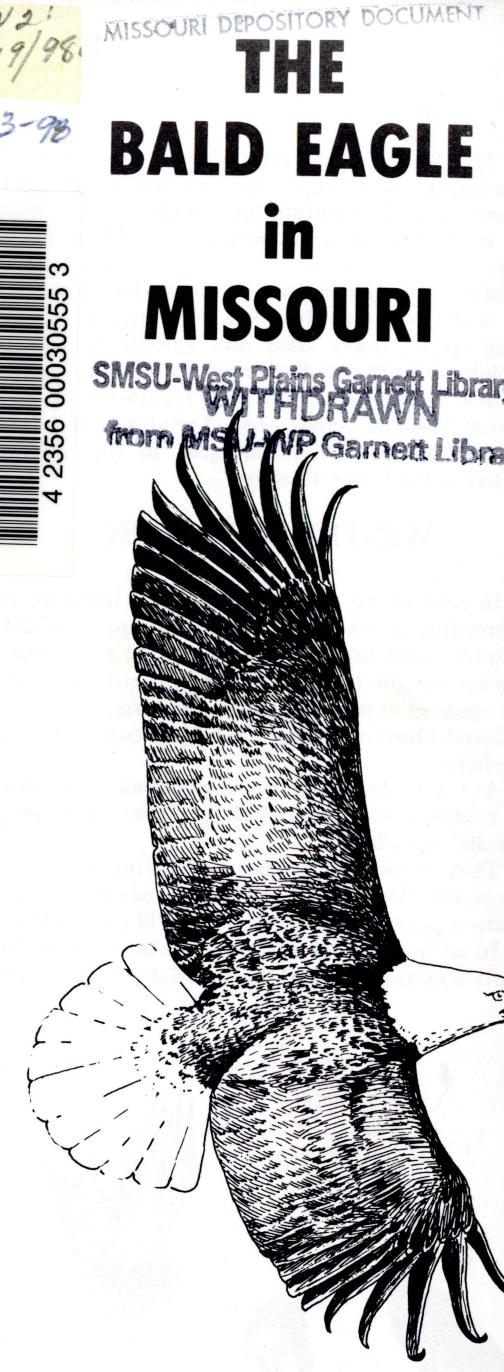
**EYESIGHT:** Five to six times sharper than a human's.

**SPEED:** 20 to 40 miles per hour in normal flight. Over 100 miles per hour while diving.

**RANGE:** Formerly bred throughout North America but now breeds mainly in Canada and its adjacent states, Alaska and Florida. Winters at scattered locations throughout the continent.



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## MIGRATORY BEHAVIOR

A few Bald Eagles are usually detected in Missouri by mid-fall. The majority arrive in December. In some cases, individuals will return to the same locations each winter.

As areas in north Missouri freeze up, some will migrate on to open water, scattering to favorable spots as far south as the Gulf Coast. They begin moving back north again in late February, and it is rare to see an eagle in Missouri after April 1.

By May, most have returned to their nests along lakes and streams in the northern coniferous forests.

**T**O THE SURPRISE of most people, Missouri is one of the leading Bald Eagle states. Each fall, thousands of these water-frequenting birds migrate south from their nesting range in Canada and the Great Lakes states.

Many take up residence wherever they encounter open water and plentiful food. Missouri, because of its big rivers, many lakes and wildlife refuges, is especially attractive to these huge, magnificent birds.

Over 1,400 Bald Eagles were reported in and adjacent to Missouri during a recent winter, making our state second only to Washington in the number counted in the lower 48 states!

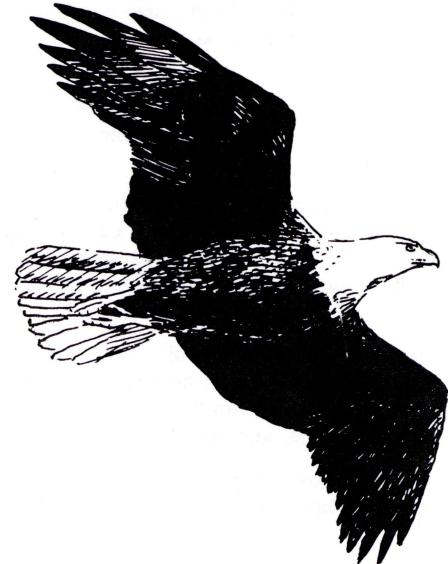
## WINTER BEHAVIOR

In contrast to their rather solitary behavior on the breeding grounds, Bald Eagles are quite sociable in winter. They form into loose flocks in areas where there are remote trees for roosting. Nearly 400 have been counted at one time on Squaw Creek Refuge in northwest Missouri, one of the highest concentrations anywhere.

At waterfowl areas they feed primarily on dead and crippled waterfowl. Fish compose the bulk of their diet elsewhere.

They usually detect prey by soaring, or from a high perch. Piracy is not beneath the eagle and if one obtains a prize catch, others often will pursue him.

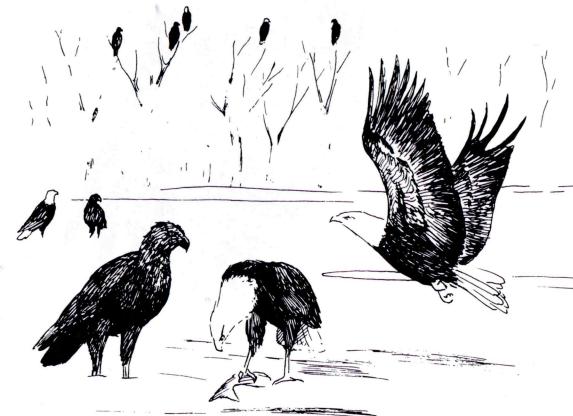
In addition to feeding sites, a wintering locality usually contains separate, more isolated night roosts.



## EARLY HISTORY

Like wolves, lions and other large predators, eagles have captured man's imagination through the centuries. It was logical that early settlers in the New World selected the Bald Eagle, a uniquely American species, as a favorite.

In 1782—the year the Bald Eagle was formally adopted as our national emblem—it was probably flourishing, with as many as 20,000 nesting pairs in what is now the United States.



## NESTING IN MISSOURI

Nesting Bald Eagles were described as frequent in Missouri in the early 1800s. By 1890 they were nearly eliminated as nesters.

There have been few verified eagle nests in Missouri during this century. Between 1965 and 1982, there were no known nestings; however, since then the few in Missouri and adjacent states indicate that breeding Bald Eagles are recolonizing this part of the U.S.

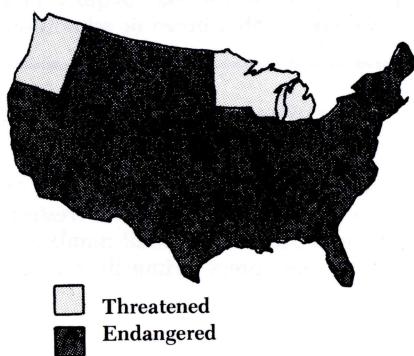
To assist in determining the Bald Eagle's breeding status, any citizen who sees an adult eagle in Missouri from May to August, should report it to the Conservation Department.



## THE EAGLE'S DECLINE

In the 200 years since the Bald Eagle became our living symbol of strength and freedom, its numbers have declined alarmingly. Victims of human encroachment, habitat destruction, environmental contamination and open persecution, by the late 1800s they were generally relegated to their current breeding range which includes Alaska, Canada, the Great Lakes states and the Pacific Northwest. Today there are only about 1,400 nesting pairs in the lower 48 states.

Concerned about their plight, the federal government in 1978 declared the Bald Eagle an endangered species in 43 states, including Missouri. They are listed as threatened in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Oregon and Washington, and unlisted in Alaska where approximately 10,000 still breed.



## RESTORING NESTING BALD EAGLES

Beginning in 1981, the Missouri Department of Conservation, in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Dickerson Park Zoo, Springfield, has annually released young Bald Eagles in Missouri in an attempt to reestablish them as nesters. Eaglets six to seven weeks old are obtained from captive breeding facilities or healthy wild populations and released from artificial nests within suitable nesting habitat. These eagles will imprint on the region and return to it to breed when mature.

This program, plus the eagle's tendency to naturally recolonize its former nesting range, inspires hope that someday we will again find eagles breeding regularly in Missouri.